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AUTHOR Downing, Bruce T.; Dwyer, Sharon
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ABSTRACT

This study examines some aspects of the interaction of one Hmong family with the English-speaking community to determine what sort of language contact situations they encounter and what means they use to communicate in those situations. Observations revealed that English language use outside of the classroom was limited. The subjects did not seek out and, sometimes actively avoided, situations requiring the use of English. Where the use of English could not be avoided, communal communication strategies involving spokespersons or interpreters (occasionally a younger member of the family) were employed. Only when spokespersons were unavailable did adults attempt to communicate directly. This action questions the common assumption in second language teaching that what is taught in the classroom will be reinforced through outside language contacts. This Hmong practice may reflect not only a lack of appropriate language learning skills but also a tradition of community isolation and self-sufficiency carried over from the Hmong experience as a geographically isolated minority in Laos and China. Communal strategies of survival communication might provide a way for the community as a whole to succeed even though some individuals might never learn to communicate in English well enough to survive alone. (Author/JK)

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Hmong Refugees in an American City:

A Case Study in Language Contact

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Bruce T. Downing
Sharon Dwyer

Department of Linguistics
University of Minnesota
July, 1981

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1. INTRODUCTION*

Since 1975 some eight thousand Hmong refugees from Laos have taken up residence in the Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, out of nearly 50,000 Hmong now in the United States.

In Laos life for the majority of these people involved slash-and-burn farming in remote mountain areas and a highly developed social system of family alliances, villages, and clans, animistic religious beliefs, and an intricate artisanship in cut-work, embroidery, and silver. Their population was decimated by the wars in Laos, and most who come here have spent years in resettlement villages and the refugee camps in Thailand. The majority of the refugees have been illiterate, with little or no familiarity with English or any other second language when they arrive, and most are new to the experience of going to school.

Naturally communication between the Hmong refugees and the Americans assisting them in the resettlement process has been a serious problem. Both the resettlement agencies and the Hmong community leaders themselves have recognized that the most essential prerequisite for successful adaptation to life in America is the ability to communicate in English, even if only at an instrumental, survival level. But the task undertaken by teachers of English as a second language, of providing formal instruction in English for them was and in some cases still is, made difficult by several factors. One has been an inevitable mutual lack of understanding on the part of the American teachers and the Hmong students of the others' culture and mentality. A second problem is the refugees' unfamiliarity with classroom skills, and their illiteracy.

working with Hmong adults on basic English skills, and note some possible directions for further research.

2. THE LINGUISTIC WORLD OF A HMONG REFUGEE FAMILY

A. Methodology

Because we were aware of the tightly interwoven social system of the Hmong, in which value is placed upon the ability of the community to function effectively, in contrast to the Western emphasis on the individual, we felt that the question of language contact experiences had to be investigated at the level of the family or household unit rather than at that of the isolated individual. To keep this initial study to a manageable size, we decided therefore to focus on a single representative family, in an effort to develop a fairly comprehensive understanding of this family's language abilities, experiences, and strategies of cross-cultural communication.

The first task was to try to find a family that was willing to cooperate with our study and that could be taken as representative of the recently arrived Hmong refugee population. We stipulated that the family should have come to the United States in the last two years and that all members of the family should be able to communicate to some extent in English. Through contacts with a member of a sponsoring church we were able to locate a family that satisfied these requirements. Though somewhat puzzled by our interests and activities, the family members were initially receptive and later exceedingly friendly and cooperative.

Adding to this is the ESL teachers' initial lack of familiarity, training, and experience in meeting students' simultaneous needs for basic literacy and survival English. Faced with an immediate and pressing problem, it has been difficult for teachers to identify exactly what their students' immediate communicational needs are, although obviously an appropriate curriculum for "survival English" must be based on an understanding of the actual situations in which the learner is called upon to communicate in English and the nature and content of this communication.

In the study reported here we have tried to address only this last problem. We have set out to find at least partial answers to the following questions: a) what are the language contact experiences[1] that Hmong refugees may have in the first year or two of their life in the United States, and b) what goes on in those interactions; in particular, how do they manage communication when their knowledge of English vocabulary, grammar, and usage is inadequate to the task?[2] Section two addresses our first question, concerning the general nature of Hmong-American linguistic interactions. It is in effect a study in the ethnography of communication, although limited for the present to a single household and to cross-linguistic communications. Section Three is concerned with the second question, involving how the Hmong cope when communication demands exceed their ability to say what they want in English. We have here relied upon the categorization of "communication strategies" presented by Tarone (1978).[3] Finally, in a concluding section, we will summarize our findings, make a few tentative observations and suggestions that may be useful to teachers

Having selected the family and obtained their cooperation, we undertook to observe their English language encounters and their use of English to communicate. We visited their home and their ESL classes, talked with them ourselves, and observed them interacting with other Americans in a variety of situations. We accompanied them on several outings and observed a number of tutoring sessions and conversations with church members. Finally, we interviewed the family, various members of the local business community in contact with the Hmong, and several members of the sponsoring church, for their perceptions of the problems of communication between Hmong and Americans.

These interviews and observations, carried out over a period of four months, have in most cases been recorded on cassette tape. The recordings have been transcribed and some portions translated by an able bilingual assistant, Vang Vang.

It should be obvious that even a fairly extensive case study can provide only very tentative answers to our general question concerning the range of language contact experiences of Hmong refugee families in America. We should note further that even this case study is not complete, since for one thing we have focused most of our attention on the parents and the family unit, giving little direct attention to the children as individual language users.

B. The Subjects

The Vang family, as we shall call them, consists of a father and mother in their early forties and three children: an older girl, 17, a younger girl, aged 9, and a boy, 15. An older son is married and lives in another city. The given names we will use in referring to

the individual family members (the "names" are actually kinship terms) are as follows:

Txiv	the father	age 45 (approximate)
Niam	the mother	age 40 (approximate)
Laus	daughter	age 17
Tus Tub	son	age 15
Ntxawm	daughter	age 9

The Vang family arrived in the United States in March of 1980, after five years in a refugee camp in Thailand. They came directly to Saint Paul, sponsored by a church congregation. The family lives on refugee assistance funds supplemented by contributions from the church and their married son. The church has looked after the family's immediate needs: living space, health problems, clothing, most transportation, and schooling. They were fortunate in getting the parents into regular English classes very soon after their arrival. The church members have also helped the family in such matters as banking, insurance, welfare, and leases, and they are now trying to arrange jobs. In addition, church members have volunteered to provide tutoring in English in the home on an almost daily basis.

The family lives in one apartment of a quadraplex. The other apartments are also occupied by Hmong, with the grandfather and his wife in one, and cousins' families in the other two apartments. Individual apartments are rarely closed off, the entire building serving as more or less communal living space. The Vangs however have no friends, either Hmong or American, living in the immediate neighborhood outside of their building.

Neither parent can read or write Hmong or Laotian, and neither speaks Laotian to any extent. Vang Txiv, the father, speaks some Thai. He was a farmer most of his life, serving only for a brief time in the military. Vang Niam, his wife, is expert in Hmong stitchery and cooking; her responsibilities and activities would seem to have continued with much less change from the past than for other members of the family. The son, aged 15, speaks some Thai and some Lao, and received lessons in English in the camp. His present language ability in English is by far the most advanced; he can serve moderately well as an interpreter in most situations, and he seems to be succeeding in his schoolwork at the ninth-grade level. Both sisters are exceedingly shy and were more difficult to approach directly, making it hard to assess their levels of understanding and fluency in English.

As has been mentioned, the family lives together with three other Hmong families. Additionally, much time is passed in visiting or receiving visits from other relatives. Social contacts with the American community are limited to those with members of the sponsoring church in the tutoring sessions and in dealing with questions about their family affairs. The adults do not seek out social contacts with the American community.

C. Learning and Using English

The adult English classes attended by the two parents have included classes in Survival English. The emphasis in these classes is on the mastery of simple grammar points, pronunciation, and, at the level we observed, literacy skills. There are only limited opportunities to practice real, meaningful communication or to practice the coping skills

necessary for handling situations where the communicative needs exceed the learner's command of English. The homework the Vangs now receive consists of written assignments including basic arithmetic problems, answering questions about a story, copying a passage or practicing a reading passage.

The tutoring sessions provided by volunteers from the church were generally limited to topics such as numbers, telling time, addition or subtraction of sums of money, naming things in picture books, practicing greetings, and practicing the alphabet and the spellings of familiar words. Some meaningful communication with the sponsors took place when the Americans tried to assist with household problems, although here the focus was on accomplishing the task and not on teaching the family how to cope with problems of communication.

Apart from the ESL classroom, the tutoring sessions in the home, and the children's attendance at public schools, we found the Vang's contacts with English speakers to be quite limited and to involve very little actual communication in English. The English language interactions that we either observed at first hand or learned something about at second hand are the following:

1) ESL classes for adults and public school programs for the children
2) Contacts with tutors, in the home
3) Riding the bus to school
4) Banking (assisted by a church member)
5) Dealings with the landlord (usually assisted by a church member)
6) Shopping for food
7) Shopping for clothing and other commodities

8) Major purchases, such as a car, TV, or radio

9) Church: occasional services and social events and one incident involving communication about the death of a relative

10) Doctor's and dentist's appointments (assisted by a church member)

The types of situations we actually observed included 1) ESL classes for adults and 2) tutoring sessions, 6) shopping for food, 7) shopping for clothing and for fabrics, and 9) a situation in which relatives had gathered at a church following a relative's death.

We found that communication in English outside of the ESL class is minimal and is not always handled in the same way. Four principal means of communication could be distinguished, as follows.

First, in situations such as riding on the bus or shopping for groceries, almost no verbal communication took place. We should re-emphasize that the Vangs never initiated conversations in English and, in fact, actively avoided situations that might lead others to speak to them. Other Hmong have been observed hiding their faces on the buses, and storeowners told us that Hmong people shop very carefully but without requesting assistance. Unless there is a problem with a check, voucher, or food stamp purchase, they can and usually do check out without exchanging words with the cashier. Thus in many contact situations spoken English is not essential for this initial level of survival, and the social contact experience does not necessarily provide a language experience.

Second, there are some situations such as banking or negotiating with the landlord in which an American sponsor takes charge, acting as a spokesperson or guardian. In these interactions, the difficult part of the communication is handled by the American with minimal verbal

communication directed to the family members--chiefly the seeking and receiving of consent or verification.

The third type of interaction, to be discussed further in section 3, involves the selection of a member of the family or of the broader Hmong community to act as interpreter for an individual or a group. The person chosen is the one with the best command of English, usually a boy or young man. Thus, in many of our attempts to communicate with the older Vangs or in their negotiations with tutors, or in handling phone calls, or where problems arose requiring verbal communication while shopping, the son served as interpreter or, in some cases, as spokesperson.

Finally, and seemingly only where all other approaches failed (or where demands were minimal, as in returning a greeting), the individual adult communicated directly in English. This fact, while perhaps not surprising, is important in that it shows the extent to which adults can survive as residents in an English-speaking American community without English. It also reveals that, contrary to the expectations of many ESL teachers, the adult Hmong learner may have only the most limited experience with the English language outside of the classroom.

Keeping in mind these observations concerning the general English-language experience of a Hmong refugee family in an American city, we may now turn to the second focus of our study, concerning the specific strategies used to effect communication in English on the part of individuals with limited knowledge of English. We will look both at the parents' own use of English and at the pervasive strategy of using an interpreter or spokesperson for the family, which will suggest an

extension of the notion of communication strategy developed by Tarone and others.

3. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

A The Framework of Analysis

We are concerned here with the means used by a non-native speaker to achieve communication in the second language (English) when his or her mastery of the vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and discourse usages of the language is inadequate to the task. Tarone (1980, p.2) defines communication strategies as "mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where the requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. Communication strategies are seen as tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning, in situations where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to what is meant."

As has been mentioned, we have chosen to use the conceptual framework proposed by Tarone, although different frameworks have been suggested by other researchers (see, for example, Faerch and Kaspar 1979, Bialystok and Frohlich 1980, and Palmberg 1979) to shed light on differing aspects of learner communication strategies.

Tarone specifies the following three criteria as prerequisites to an interaction being termed a communication strategy:

1) The speaker desires to communicate a meaning X

2) The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning X is unavailable, or is not shared with the listener

3) The speaker chooses to

   a) avoid communicating X

b) attempt alternate means to communicate X. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning. (Tarone 1980)

The absence of one of the three criteria would mean for Tarone that the strategy should be called by some other name--such as learning strategy or production strategy (see Tarone 1980 for discussion). In essence, from the speaker's point of view the main purpose for the interaction must be the desire to convey information--not to practice the use of some recently acquired structure or rehearsed speech in the target language, nor to try out a hypothesized structure with the purpose of learning more about the target language by finding out whether the hypothesis works or not.

Tarone (1980) divides communication strategies into five major types which are then further divided into sub-categories. Below is an explanation of each category and subcategory including examples from Tarone's 1978 study and from Varadi 1973.

Paraphrase

Approximation - The learner uses a single target language vocabulary item or structure which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features with the desired notion to satisfy the speaker (e.g.,"pipe" for "waterpipe").

Word coinage - The learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept (e.g.,"airball" for "balloon").

Circumlocution- The learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appro-

priate target language structure ("She is, uh, smoking something. I don't know what's its name. That's uh, Persian, and we use in Turkey, a lot of.").

Transfer

Literal translation - the learner translates word for word from the native language (e.g., "He invites him to drink," for "They toast one another.").

Language switch - the learner uses the native language term without bothering to translate (e.g.,"balon" for "balloon," or "tirtil" for "caterpillar").

Appeal for Assistance - the learner asks for the correct term or structure (e.g., "What is this?").

Mime - the learner uses non-verbal strategies in place of a meaning structure (e.g., clapping one's hands to illustrate applause).

Avoidance

Topic avoidance - occurs when the learner simply does not talk about concepts for which the vocabulary or other meaning structure is not known or shared.

Message abandonment - occurs when the learner begins to talk about a concept but, lacking a meaning structure, is unable to continue and stops in mid-utterance.

Given the basic criteria for a communication strategy--that the speaker must desire to communicate a meaning--the sub-category of topic avoidance is the most difficult to identify unambiguously as a strategy of communication. As Tarone (1980) points out, some strategies, such as

topic avoidance, may be used for various reasons: at times to simplify the speaking task (in which case it is a production strategy) and at times to solicit aid in negotiation of meaning from the native speaker interlocutor (in which case it is a communication strategy). In the picture description tasks used by Tarone, failure to describe a particularly salient aspect of the picture could easily be determined to be topic avoidance. However, in observational studies such as this one, it is more difficult to determine whether a learner is avoiding a topic because she does not have the needed verbal structures or because she really does not want to talk about that topic. We have assumed in classifying anything as topic avoidance that the former was the case. The Vangs never gave any other sign that they might be unwilling to discuss any given topic--in general they were friendly and open in their attempts to communicate with us.

B. Findings: Individual Strategies

The following chart contains examples of our findings. For each example, the <u>situation</u> is described and the <u>speakers</u> involved. Zero (Ø) means that there was no verbal response, and square brackets enclose descriptions of non-verbal gestures or our interpretations of the intent of a speaker's remarks. Each of the examples comes from one of the following situations:

<u>Shopping in a fabric store</u>. In the course of one of our visits with the Vangs, the son Tus Tub asked us to take his mother and two other women to buy material. The communication which took place involved our attempts to find out where they wanted to go and how to get there and, at the store, the efforts of the sales clerk to find out how much material each woman

wanted and to convey how much that amount would cost.

Social visit in the Vang's home. Over the four months of the study, we visited the Vang home about once a week. At first we attended tutoring sessions, but later we came around just to talk and observe what happened. Several of the instances included on the chart come from such informal conversations.

Conscious Communication Strategies (cf. Tarone 1978)

(1) Avoidance

(A) Topic Avoidance

(Social: Sharon: Txiv, what were you doing just now?
Txiv: [laughter] I don't know say.)

(Social: Txiv: Chia Thao and Cynthia coming . . .
Bruce: Why did they come?
Txiv: Chia Thao . . . I don't know say.)

(B) Message Abandonment: None

(2) Paraphrase

(A) Approximation

(Social: Niam: Have many, many rain [i.e., there is a lot of rain there].)

(Social: Niam: I many, many chicken and rice [i.e., I eat chicken and rice a lot].)

(B) Word coinage: None

(3) Conscious Transfer

(A) Literal Translation: None

(B) Language Switch

(Shopping: Salesperson: So, how much do you want of this [one kind of material]?

Cousin: [Stream of Hmong in which she says she wants the same amount as of the first type of material.] [Laughter])

(4) Appeal for Assistance

(Shopping: Salesperson: How long have you been here?

Niam: Ø [Takes on preoccupied expression and acts slightly discomfitted, finally looks at us to see if we will answer for her.]

(5) Mime

(Social: Sharon: Niam, how do you do this? [make geometric patterns in cloth]

Niam: Ø [Fetches a piece of paper and demonstrates how the pattern is made.])

(Shopping: Sharon: So, what's good thread?

Niam: Ø [Demonstrates how a strong piece of thread can be unravelled.])

We found that the adults used only six types of communication strategies: topic avoidance, message abandonment, approximation, language switch, appeal for assistance, and mime. In our data there were many examples of topic avoidance and mime, but only two examples of approximation, and one each of language switch and appeal for assistance. The greatest reliance was on non-verbal means.[4]

Although we have not analyzed all of our data on the son's interactions, it seems that his communication strategies fall mostly into the verbal categories of approximation and literal translation, with

only a few examples of mime and a few detectable examples of avoidance. He did not seem to employ any other types. This difference in communication strategies raises some interesting questions: Are certain strategies favored by certain age groups, or as we suspect, do the choices reflect the language proficiency of the learner? On the other hand, can the son use verbal communication strategies because he is more proficient in English, or is he more proficient because (among other things) he is more aggressive in using strategies which may promote his language learning?[5]

C. Communal Strategies

Thus far we have approached communication strategies only from the perspective of the individual speaker attempting to transfer a meaning. But we have already noted the frequent use of intermediaries as translators or spokespersons by the older Hmong adults in preference to direct communication in English on their own. By this means adults do get messages across, but rather than handling the linguistic formulation into English themselves or using some communication strategy as a substitute, they primarily rely on the individual with the best command of English to convey the message for the group. For example, storeowners and clerks have commented that the Hmong appear in large groups to do their shopping, with one person acting as a go-between for the entire group. When a family is shopping together, the parents select the items to be bought and the children take over at the check-out. While this last case may seem to violate normal role structures in the family, by elevating a young boy or girl to a position of responsibility, these two coping strategies are very much in tune with the general

corporate kinship structure of the Hmong, which emphasizes the family and community unit over the individual.

To accommodate this observed community approach to communication, we have gone outside Tarone's framework to oppose to her individual strategies a category of communal communication strategies.

In the following table we exemplify such strategies, mostly from situations in which the Vang's younger son, Tus Tub, served as interpreter for his parents or took upon himself the role of spokesman for his family.

Communal Communication Strategies

(1) Use of an Interpreter

(Social: Tus Tub acts as interpreter for individuals who were trying to relate some of their experiences in the war and information about their life in Laos.)

(Church: Tus Tub acts as interpreter to relay information about the death of a relative.)

(2) Use of a Spokesperson

(A) For an individual

(Social: Tus Tub acts as a spokesman, relating the story of his father's life, in response to a question addressed to his father.)

(Shopping: Son acts as a spokesman for his father who wants to buy a shopping cart and some clothes.)

(B) For a group

(Shopping: [reported] An individual with experience takes

charge of making a major purchase.)

(Social: The other adults in the same quadraplex with the Vangs have no English classes. Tus Tub requests that we find classes for them.)

The examples given above were drawn from three situations:

Social: In this instance, we were just getting to know the family. Our appearance one Sunday afternoon had led to the eventual gathering of a number of male relatives in the Vang living room. (It is still a mystery where they all came from and how they assembled so quickly.) We began asking them questions about their lives in Laos, the war, and their subsequent flights to Thailand. Most of our conversation was conducted via Tus Tub as interpreter. The tales began with Tus Tub relating his father's life story, although to our surprise he did not consult his father, who was sitting silently close by; Txiv himself did not participate. Our questions to others, however, and their subsequent replies were quite fully translated by Tus Tub. Only the questions directed to his father were answered directly by Tus Tub without consultation.

Church: On this occasion, we had arrived for our usual Sunday visit with the family only to find them seemingly a little less happy to see us. It turned out that one of their recently arrived relatives had died suddenly during the night. (It was the son who explained this.) We took Tus Tub and his father to the church where the widow and other relatives had assembled and offered our help. In this instance, Tus Tub acted as interpreter for his extended family.

Shopping: We did not directly observe a group represented by an

individual engaged in a shopping transaction, but an interview with two assistant store managers provided considerable information including the example cited above of the problems and shopping practices of Hmong customers in a discount supermarket in the Vangs' neighborhood.

From the viewpoint of the individual adult learner, the strategy of using an interpreter or spokesperson is a kind of avoidance, a strategy that cannot aid the individual's own linguistic development. But from the communal point of view, of course, it not only provides the best means of conveying and receiving messages but it also, we may note, maximizes the language experience of the community's best speakers, presumably helping them to develop their own knowledge and communication skills even further. It is difficult to say whether this benefit is a conscious consideration in the community's selection of this means of communication.

The use of translators or spokespersons in intercultural communication is certainly nothing new and may not be uniquely associated with the Hmong community among America's linguistic minorities. But there are three points to consider which make it a phenomenon worth noting and worth further examination. Translators or spokespersons are usually used by people who have no need or no time to learn a language, for whom the communication situation is temporary and single-purposed, as, for example, the completion of a business deal or agreement on a treaty, or a week's visit to Hungary on vacation. But it seems probable that the Hmong who have immigrated here will be staying, which leads to the expectation that most of them should be interested in learning enough English eventually to function

independently. Of course, it is possible that the community as a whole might survive without making this assumption--communal strategies of survival communication might provide a way for the community as a whole to succeed in its new life even though some individuals might never learn to communicate in English well enough to survive alone. It has in fact been suggested to us by William Smalley (personal communication) that the communal strategies we have described may be simply a continuation of practices successfully employed for cross-linguistic communication by the Hmong communities in Laos and Thailand. In both countries, the Hmong were never really considered natives, having migrated south from China over the preceding hundred years or so and having settled in the remote highlands, largely isolated from the majority language and culture. The question now is whether practices which may have served well under those circumstances are appropriate for a Hmong community existing in the midst of an essentially monolingual Western technological society.

4. CONCLUSION

We have examined some aspects of the interaction of one Hmong family with the English-speaking community to determine what sorts of language contact situations they encounter and what means they use to achieve communication in those situations. In the case reported here we find that English language use outside of the classroom is quite limited: the family we observed does not seek out, and sometimes actively avoids, situations requiring the use of English. Where communication with English speakers cannot be avoided,

spokespersons or interpreters are usually employed, even though this role may elevate a younger member of the family to a position of prestige and authority. Only when this communal strategy of communication is not available do the parents attempt to communicate directly, and then the strategies they employ most are those which seem to promote language learning least. Thus the common assumption in second-language teaching that what is taught in the classroom will be reinforced through outside language contacts, particularly the assumption that adult learners will necessarily make use of their "survival English," is called into question.

We can only speculate as to whether this situation differs from the general experience of refugees and immigrants of other language backgrounds with very limited knowledge of English. We feel that the Hmong practice may reflect not only a lack of appropriate language learning skills on the part of individuals but also a tradition of community isolation and self-sufficiency carried over from the Hmong experience as a geographically isolated minority in Laos and, before that, in China.

The fact that the Hmong can achieve a degree of accommodation to American life without universal mastery of basic English language skills raises some interesting questions regarding the process of assimilation. Does the use of communal communication strategies provide a valuable buffer against some of the shock of relocation within a radically different cultural setting? Assuming that the use of interpreters as an alternative to developing individual proficiency in English provides some relief from culture shock,

what are the consequences with respect to achieving economic self-sufficiency? Can jobs be found in which Hmong workers can communicate with their employers (or their customers) through the services of a bilingual foreman or interpreter? Or must each Hmong adult be expected to strive for linguistic independence through mastery of English as a prerequisite for employment?

These broad questions of resettlement policy are obviously very difficult to answer, and yet they are crucial to the English language teachers' decisions about what approach to take in the first stages of language instruction for refugee adults. Since we do not know the answers (and because our own investigation is too limited to support any broad generalizations), we hesitate to offer any suggestions for teachers. Teachers may, however, want to reconsider "survival English" as a matter involving the family or a group in some cases rather than just the individual. The teacher can choose to recognize, support, and even practice in class the process of communication through an interpreter. On the other hand, the teacher may wish to find ways to encourage and develop individual self-reliance in communication and practice in using English for genuine communication outside the classroom. In any case the teacher will want to investigate in some way the nature of the language contact experiences of her own students.

Before we can be confident about the validity of generalizations from this case study to the broader Hmong community, much additional research is needed. We have not studied relations of children with their English-speaking peers, and we need to know more about how both amateur and professional (paid) interpreters manage the process

of translation. Of course, a much larger population needs to be studied, including older adults, adults without children old enough to translate, and less isolated families. The process of communication among employees and between employees and employers has also not been studied.

With additional data, a number of interesting questions can be addressed. To what extent does avoidance of direct communication or the choice of communication strategies reflect the learner's confidence in her own linguistic abilities and attitudes toward the majority culture? To what extent does the use of individual or communal communication strategies reflect the educational level and cultural traditions of particular refugee groups? And, from a practical viewpoint, how do attitudes toward communication and strategies of communication in the majority language affect the psychological, economic and cultural adjustment of refugees to the realities of life in this new land?

NOTES

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1. In this paper "language contact" will be used to mean cross-lingual interactions rather than to refer to the interaction of two languages within one speaker, as in the works of Uriel Wienreich, Dell Hymes, and others.

2. Gumperz and Hymes (1964) have argued for the value of this kind of study in planning curricula in bilingual and general education for ethnic minority students. The view that an understanding of the students' linguistic environment is essential to planning effective language instruction is also the basis of the European-born "functional-notional" curriculum. As van Ek

notes in his book The Threshold Level for Modern Language Learning in the Schools (1975, p. 6):

> Our task, then, in defining a language learning objective, is to determine what language functions the learner will have to be able to perform and what notions they will have to be able to handle. It will be obvious that we can only perform our task if we have some insight into what may be expected to be the communication needs of the learner himself, in the type of contacts he may be expected to have which necessitate the use of a foreign language.

3. The study of communication strategies may yield very rich insights into the nature and function of learner interlanguage. At the very least they reflect the spontaneous language proficiency of the learner when she is concentrating on the transmission of a message rather than on her performance or progress in the second language. For survival language learning almost all spontaneous interactions in the second language involve coping with language which is beyond her ability. Alternative modes of transmitting a message, in essence communication strategies, will be in constant use. For these reasons the study of communication strategies will contribute to a better understanding of language acquisition processes.

4. There is one additional category of response which we could not fit into the above analysis although it occurred frequently enough to warrant notice: repetition of a question or request spoken by the native speaker. For example, in the shopping situation described

above, we did not know where the three women wanted to go shopping. Sharon asked: "OK, where are we shopping?" Niam responded "Where are we shopping?" Sharon: "No, where? (With a shrug and a puzzled facial expression) Where go?" Niam: (settling into the back seat) "Where go?" We finally began driving, asking as we went where to turn and in what direction.

It is very difficult to determine what motivated these repetitions. Perhaps Niam was assuming that her son had clarified the matter and that we were only asking questions to make conversation. Perhaps she was lapsing into behaviour that was encouraged in the classroom. Perhaps she could not process the questions, but wanted to indicate her desire to participate in the conversation--a kind of goodwill message. Only if this last explanation were accepted could repetition be considered a kind of communication strategy, which did not, however, convey the information we needed to know, though it may have conveyed her message of desire to continue the conversation. It is interesting to note that although the learner apparently could not process the message and respond, she could repeat the utterance with astonishing accuracy of pronunciation, syntax, and intonation.

5. Some researchers have in fact suggested (although it has not yet been established by a rigorous study) that the learner's choice of communication strategies may have negative or positive effects on the learning of the language. Faerch and Kaspar (1979), for example, have suggested that of the traditional categories in Tarone's schema the constant choice by a language learner of topic avoidance, mime, translation, or requests for assistance, while they may be effective

in the communication of a certain immediate message, may not have the added long-term benefit of helping the learner improve her fluency in the language, while other types of communication strategies such as paraphrase and approximation may have such long-term benefits.

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